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ABSTRACT

In the design and development of telecommunications-based instructional delivery systems, attention to faculty involvement and training is often overlooked until the system is operational. The Waubonsee Telecommunications Instructional Consortium (TIC), in Illinois, is one network that benefited from early faculty input. Even before the first piece of equipment was installed, faculty participated in site visits to other distance learning systems to provide feedback on instructional features. Faculty were encouraged to view distance learning not as a threat, but a way of providing access to their courses to a wider audience. To expose faculty to the technology, for the past 6 years Waubonsee Community College has provided 3-day training sessions to faculty on a volunteer basis. The workshops usually have 15 participants whose suggestions are incorporated into the classroom design and operation. Teachers generally do not want to be told how to teach, but do appreciate the handbook of instructional hints for successful utilization of the telecommunications classroom. During the workshop each teacher presents one micro-lesson while the other participants serve as students, some from remote sites, giving them insight on what instructional methods best serve their discipline. Participating faculty are compensated for their time, and of the 89 faculty members who have been trained to date, 46 have chosen to teach on the network. Involving faculty in design and implementation has been critical to the success of the Waubonsee TIC. (KP)

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Engaging Faculty in Telecommunications-Based Instructional Delivery Systems

In the design and development of telecommunications-based instructional delivery systems, the focus is too often limited to the technology. Any attention to faculty involvement and training is often overlooked until the system is operational. Since the primary user of the telecommunications network is the teacher, it is important that faculty have input in the earliest stages of network design and implementation.

The Waubonsee Telecommunications Instructional Consortium (TIC) is an excellent example of a telecommunications network that has benefitted from early faculty involvement. Prior to the installation of the first piece of equipment, a programming manager was hired to begin the process of developing faculty support for the distance learning initiative. Faculty participated in site visits to other distance learning systems and were encouraged to provide feedback on the instructional features that they thought would be effective in the telecommunications classroom. When designing a telecommunications system the goal should be to make the system as user friendly as possible. By providing faculty the opportunity for input in the early stages of design, a sense of ownership in the project is developed.

Another issue that deserves particular attention is the recruitment of faculty to teach on the distance learning network. Faculty are often reluctant to embrace new technologies and the manner in which faculty are approached to participate in a distance learning environment can have an impact on the acceptance and success of the network. Rather than view distance learning networks as a threat, faculty should be encouraged to look at distance learning as a way to

provide access to their courses to a wider audience, that shared enrollments will give them the opportunity to teach a course that previously had to be canceled due to low enrollments. Participation in the distance learning network should be on a volunteer basis and information sessions and training workshops should be made available to all faculty. Once they become familiar with the operation of the classroom, they will come to recognize that the distance learning network is simply another method for delivering instruction and that excellent teaching can occur in this environment.

At Waubonsee Community College faculty training sessions for teaching on the distance learning network have been conducted each year for the past six years. Each 3-day workshop usually has 15 participants. During the course of the first workshop faculty were encouraged to suggest changes in the layout of the classroom that would help make a smooth transition from the traditional classroom to the telecommunications classroom. Faculty reaction to the technology will be viewed and often accepted by the students. In an effort to ensure that the reaction to the technology would be as favorable as possible, the suggestions made by faculty during the course of the workshop were taken very seriously and incorporated into the classroom design and operation. Subsequent workshops have yielded additional suggestions that have contributed to the classroom design that is currently in use.

Another lesson learned during the workshop sessions is that faculty don't want to be to be told how to teach, rather they want to learn how the equipment in the classroom operates and what techniques can be learned to become more effective in the telecommunications classroom. Many of the troubleshooting techniques and instructional "hints" for the successful utilization of the telecommunications classroom were incorporated into a faculty handbook. One of the goals

of the handbook is to reduce staff involvement in the instructional process and encourage the teacher to take full control of the telecommunications classroom.

During the workshop each teacher is expected to teach one micro-lesson. In order to prepare for this exercise, a master teacher who has taught on the telecommunications system conducts a sample lesson and starts discussing all of the things that might happen in the telecommunications classroom. At this point the teachers start thinking about and questioning the classroom dynamics in this environment. During the micro-lesson the other teachers role play as students, some at the origination site, some at the remote site. As "students", teachers give feedback about instructional methods that they feel would benefit their experience in the telecommunications classroom. It is this opportunity to find out what it is like to be a student in this environment that provides teachers with the most insight into the instructional methods that will work best for their discipline in a telecommunications classroom. Very little time is spent on the actual operation of the equipment, the majority of time is well spent learning what it takes to communicate with a student who is many miles away, yet part of the class.

Faculty who participate in the training sessions are compensated for their time. It is important to recognize faculty for their input and participation in the development of telecommunications networks. Faculty participation in the telecommunications network is voluntary. Faculty are invited to participate in the training sessions, encouraged to practice using the telecommunications classroom and yet can still exercise the option not to teach on the network. 89 faculty members have been trained. Of that number 46 have taught a wide variety of courses on the network. The courses offered on the network have been selected by faculty. Foreign language teachers immediately realized that their interactive teaching style adapted well

to this medium. Accounting teachers use the high resolution television monitors to project detailed materials. Science teachers utilize the overhead camera for demonstration. This eliminates the need to have the entire class crowd around a podium to see a demonstration. In the telecommunications classroom everyone has a good view.

The evolution of the telecommunications classroom and the schedule of courses that are offered on the network could not have been accomplished without input from the faculty. Faculty are critical spokespersons for telecommunications-based delivery systems. The message they convey to the students we are trying to serve can greatly effect the utilization of this medium for instruction. Involving faculty in the entire process, from design to implementation, is an important step that can not be overlooked.